

**LOWER BIG BLUE NATURAL RESOURCES  
DISTRICTBOARD MEETING  
June 13, 2024  
8:30 AM**

Notice of the meeting was published in accordance with Section 84-1411, Nebraska Statutes, in the Beatrice Daily Sun and the Wilber Republican. Notice was also sent to Radio Station KWBE, Crete News, and Fairbury Journal-News. In accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act, the Open Meetings Act is posted on the north wall of the meeting room for public viewing.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Larry Barta at 8:30 a.m.

Directors Present: Larry Barta, Ryan Birkett, Steve Kelley, Bob Lorenz, Duane Parde, Jason Pohlmann, Dean Roehr, Jason Sand, Rodney Skleba, Doug Stokebrand, Chad Weichel.

Staff Present: Scott Sobotka, Manager; Adam Kimmerling, Office Administrator; Ryan Thomas, Resources Specialist, Scott Theis, Operations Supervisor; Nick Schroeder, GIS/IT/Data Specialist, Brandy Scholl, NRD Clerk, Tyler Weishahn, Assistant Manager

Directors Absent: Darrell Rains, Brent Katz

Others Present: Kelli Evans, Gage County NRCS.

APPROVAL OF June 13, 2024 CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION #1 was made by Ryan Birkett, seconded by Jason Pohlmann, to adopt the Consent Agenda for the June 13, 2024, board meeting which includes: adoption of the agenda as submitted, approval of the May 9, 2024, meeting minutes, financial status report dated May 31, 2024, May 2024 bills payable, May 2024 revenues, monthly bank account summary and Beatrice West and Wymore Rural Water Financials. Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Pohlmann, Roehr, Skleba, Weichel. **NAY:** None  
**ABSTAIN:** None. **NOT PRESENT:** Parde, Sand, Stokebrand.

OPEN PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

Director Sand arrived at 8:38 a.m.

WATER PERMITS, IRRIGATION AGREEMENTS

Ryan presented an irrigation agreement for Bear Pierce Cedar 7J. Doug Parde is seeking to renew an agreement to irrigate 231.98 acres with 85.80 acre feet of water. Doug owns 86% of the permanent pool. 14% is owned by General Agricultural Services who have consented to allowing Doug to use their proportional share.

MOTION #2 was made by Dean Roehr, seconded by Rodney Skleba, to enter into a 10 year irrigation agreement with Doug Parde to irrigate 231.98 acres with 85.80 acre feet of water from Bear Pierce Cedar 7J. Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Weichel. **NAY:** None  
**ABSTAIN:** None. **NOT PRESENT:** Parde, Stokebrand.

## INFORMATION & EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT – CHAD WEICHEL

Chad reported on the committee meeting held May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024. He noted the following changes to the proposed FY 2025 budget.

Windstream will no longer be offering web hosting services. Nick has been working with several companies to get quotes for a new website. The website line item is budgeted at \$16,600. It was also noted that the District has designed the website in house until now and this will be largely a one-time cost. The cost estimate in this budget reflects the highest estimate received to date, however actual cost may be lower depending on the firm selected.

Scott mentioned that Adam has the watershed handout complete. The pamphlet will be sent to anyone who is involved with an NRD structure.

The Lower Big Blue will not host land or range judging this year.

The equipment line item will be reduced to \$200.

Newsletter will be increased to \$8,500 to account for a slight increase in printing costs. The NRD publishes three to four newsletters per year.

Educational activities will increase to \$800.

Miscellaneous expenses are budgeted to increase \$200 to \$3,700.

The FY 2025 Information & Education Budget is \$34,850.00, which is \$13,900.00 higher than FY 2024, due to the increase in the web hosting line item.

MOTION #3 was made by Jason Pohlmann, seconded by Ryan Birkett, to approve the proposed Information and Education budget of \$34,850.00 for FY 2025. Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Weichel. **NAY:** None  
**ABSTAIN:** None. **NOT PRESENT:** Parde, Stokebrand.

Director Stokebrand arrived at 9:06 a.m.

## PROGRAMS & PROJECTS COMMITTEE REPORT –RYAN BIRKETT

### REVIEW OF NSWCP POLICY

Scott reviewed the current NSWCP policy. The NRD places priority for funding to those applications that have the highest amount of soil loss/ac/yr and are above planned or constructed flood control dams. Summer work is a priority over fall or spring work. The NRCS also prioritizes applications. The NRD has not spent its budgeted amount for NSWCP for several years. Scott recommended budgeting \$30,000 of NRD funds for the program. The District expects to receive around \$80,000 in state funds. The current cost docket allows for the program to be used for irrigation management practices including flow meters. The committee discussed allocating \$70,000 for flow meter cost share.

### 2024-2025 APPLICATIONS

Scott reviewed the 2024-2025 NSWCP applications. A total of 21 applications were received this year, requesting a total of \$374,719.00, for conservation work. The district will receive approximately \$80,000.00 from the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program. Scott recommended

\$100,000.00 as the NRD 2024-25 budgeted amount, with \$30,000 allocated to traditional practices and \$70,000 allocated to flow meters. The committee also discussed utilizing a portion of the 1 cent additional levy afforded for water management projects to NRDs.

Scott recommended the committee approve the following amounts of funding to the four counties in the NRD.

**2024-2025 NSWCP Recommendations**

<u>County</u>	<u>Applications</u>	<u>Approved</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Gage	9	8	\$ 59,238.00
Saline	11	9	\$ 59,683.50
Jefferson	0	0	\$ 0
Pawnee	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>\$ 8,000.00</u>
	21	18	\$ 126,921.50

Tyler discussed the possibility of applying for a WaterSMART grant through the Bureau of Reclamation, and other funding options including the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and NDNR Funding. The staff is looking to pursue a Water Sustainability Fund Application to provide further cost share dollars. Award of either grant would allow for a possible increase in the rate of cost share.

MOTION #4 was made by Dean Roehr, seconded by Rodney Skleba to sign a resolution to apply for a WaterSmart grant through the Bureau of Reclamation., Motion carried.

**YEA:** Birkett, Barta, Kelley, Lorenz, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Stokebrand. Weichel.

**NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None. **NOT PRESENT:** Parde.

**WATER QUALITY FUNDS**

The committee reviewed current water quality cost-share programs. The 2024-2025 budget proposal remains unchanged at \$60,000 however the amount has been split into two line items reflecting \$30,000 in dedicated flow meter cost share. A total of \$100,000 is available for flow meter cost share. The NRD receives around \$35,000 in state funds toward this budget item.

A summary of the district’s water quality programs was presented listing the number of flow meters cost-shared and the number of wells that were decommissioned. Moisture sensor cost share information was also reported. Discussion on ways to increase participation and benefits was held.

**URBAN CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Scott reviewed the Urban Conservation Assistance applications for FY 2025 from seven area communities. Pickrell has also asked to carry over their project from FY 2024 into FY 2025. Projects totaled \$98,736.43. This program will assist with 50% of the cost of these projects up to a maximum of \$25,000.00.

Applicants are requesting cost-share for culvert repairs and drainage improvements. Total NRD funds requested came to \$98,440.03.

## **THE NATURE CONSERVANCY**

Tyler reviewed the progress on a possible partnership with The Nature Conservancy. The proposal would pay the NRD \$15,400 for 3 years to assist with the program. The Nature Conservancy will pay producers directly at a rate of \$5/ac/yr for soil samples and \$10/ac/yr for a complete nutrient management workplan. This arrangement requires the NRD to sign a subgrant agreement with TNC.

**MOTION #5** was made by Jason Pohlmann, seconded by Bob Lorenz to sign a Sub Grant Award agreement with the Nature Conservancy. Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Stokebrand Weichel.

**NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None. **NOT PRESENT:** Parde.

## **CAPITAL EXPENDITURES FOR FY 2025**

Scott reviewed with the committee the FY 2024-2025 Capital Expenditures budget. The Blue Basin Model line item was reduced to \$9,795. The money will be used to fund the NRD portion of the Turkey Creek Stream Gauge.

Scott presented a Project Wild application from Loren Trauernicht to remove Honey Locust and Cedar from a pasture. The NRD budgets \$5,000 for this program.

The WFPO projects for both Little Indian and Plum have been set at \$275,000 and \$400,000 respectively.

The line items for the Turkey Creek National Water Quality Initiative have been removed.

The Land and Building line item was kept at \$900,000.

Scott reviewed the NRD buffer program noting that the Lower Big Blue ranks first in the State with 142 applicants. The FY 2025 budget is set at \$148,000.00

The proposed Capital Expenditures budget for FY 2025 is \$2,852,401.03

**MOTION #6** was made by Chad Weichel, seconded by Steve Kelley to approve the proposed Capital Expenditures budget for FY 2025 of \$2,852,401.03. Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Parde, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Stokebrand Weichel. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

Director Parde arrived at 9:20 a.m.

## **Beatrice West and Wymore Rural Water Projects**

Adam updated the committee on progress towards radio read meters. He also noted that the Wymore project plans to transfer \$20,000 in operations funds to the NRD.

**MOTION #7** was made by Jason Pohlmann, seconded by Steve Kelley to authorize the transfer of \$20,000 in operational funding from Wymore Rural Water to the Lower Big Blue NRD. Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Parde, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Stokebrand Weichel. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

## PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT COMMITTEE REPORT – JASON SAND

### Per Diem Policy FY 2025

The Committee reviewed the existing per diem policy and decided to add attendance at the annual Kansas-Nebraska Big Blue River Compact meetings.

**MOTION #8** was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Chad Weichel to approve the per diem policy for FY 2025 with the addition of attendance at the annual Kansas-Nebraska Big Blue River Compact meetings Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Parde, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Stokebrand Weichel. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

### NRD FY 2025 Operations Budget

The budget is due by September 30, 2024, and Dana F. Cole will again be contracted to assist with and submit the forms. The committee reviewed the current FY 2024 operations budget and the proposed FY 2025 operation budget line by line. Scott noted an increase of 2% in NARD dues while NACD dues will remain the same, plans to begin updating staff desktop computers, recent purchases of a welder and air compressor, and the need for a dump truck. The Committee also discussed the potential of purchasing and utilizing tablets for the entire Board of Directors to ensure board packets are received in advance of the meetings, as well as several other advantages tablets provide during the meetings. An estimated \$1,000 per tablet (including case) was considered.

Regarding the purchase of a dump truck, the Committee discussed possible places to purchase, as well as the need for more staff to obtain commercial drivers' licenses. The NRD has purchased through the Federal surplus before, and it was noted that the State surplus no longer requires sellers to make sure vehicles are NDOT road worthy.

**MOTION #9** was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Steve Kelley to approve the Operations Budget as presented with Committee recommendations totaling \$373,159.09. Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Parde, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Stokebrand Weichel. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

### NRD FY 2025 Personnel Budget

The Committee reviewed the current FY 2024 personnel budget and the proposed FY 2025 personnel budget line by line, as well as the FY 2023-2024 NRD Salary Survey. In addition to current staffing, the NRD plans to hire a shared Water Quality Protection Coordinator with NRCS reimbursing 50% of the personnel services and a part-time NRCS clerk who will work in the Gage County Field Office. In general, the cost-of-living increases, merit/position increases and additional manpower will result in an approximate 7.73% overall increase to the personnel budget, which amounts to a 3.63% increase when comparing existing positions. The Committee also discussed the NRD's 1% match to the option 457 Retirement Plan available to employees. Overall, the Committee expressed appreciation for and the need to retain current staff. Committee members acknowledged the rates of turnover and vacant positions at other NRDs. It was noted that this NRD's current staff consistently exhibit a willingness to cooperate, thereby maintaining a smaller workforce that is more productive. A motion was made to approve the personnel budget during the discussion but was withdrawn after it was requested that management put together a summary of what would be required to bring all staff salaries to their current statewide NRD medians and present it at a follow-up meeting on June 6<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 a.m. at 9676 W Lilac Road. The Committee expressed a goal for personnel services to be at the median per staff position before factoring in the NRD's benefits package.

The Committee also noted the value of return summer help/interns, and the need to keep pace with hourly wages and increases in order to hire and retain more driven individuals. Ultimately, the Committee recommended an annual personnel services budget that includes a \$1 per hour merit increase above individual management-recommended merit increases, as well as a 4% cost-of-living increase. It's anticipated that these increases, along with the employee benefits package, should meet the Committee's goal for most of the employees.

MOTION #10 was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Rodney Skleba to approve the proposed Personnel Services budget in the amount of \$1,087,433.07.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Parde, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Stokebrand Weichel. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

#### MOTION TO INCREASE RESTRICTED TAX AUTHORITY 1%

Scott explained to the directors that the District has the authority to levy up to an additional 1% restricted tax authority to fund groundwater management activities and integrated management activities under the Nebraska Ground Water Management and Protection Act.

MOTION #11 was made by Steve Kelley, seconded by Ryan Birkett, that the board increase the districts restricted fund taxing authority by 1% in FY 2025. Motion carried.

**YEA:** Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Parde, Pohlmann, Roehr, Sand, Skleba, Stokebrand Weichel. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

#### WATER COMMITTEE REPORT

Discussion on the progress towards updating rules and regulations was held. Dates for a public hearing were reviewed. Adam stated that the 4-H building at the Gage County Fairgrounds is available any date in August except for the 13<sup>th</sup> and any date in November except for the 17<sup>th</sup>.

#### CONSIDERATION OF EXCUSED ABSENCES

Scott reported that Brent Katz has asked to be excused from the June 13, 2024, board meeting.

MOTION #12 was made by Jason Pohlmann, seconded by Duane Parde, to excuse Brent Katz, from the June 13, 2024, board meeting. Motion Carried

**YEA:** Barta, Kelley, Lorenz, Pohlmann, Roehr, Parde, Skleba, Stokebrand Weichel. **NAY:** Birkett **ABSTAIN:** None. **NOT PRESENT:** Sand.

#### NRD ACTIVITIES

Tyler updated the Board on this year's schedule for AEM flights.

Adam reported that hay bids have been mailed out. They are due back on July 9<sup>th</sup> and will be voted on at the July meeting.

Scott noted that this year's Groundwater Management Districts Association meeting will be held in Omaha this year. Any directors interested in attending need to let Adam know.

The governor has asked to meet with the manager and one director from each NRD on July 30<sup>th</sup>.

The beta version of the Producer Connect app is expected in July. Scott asked for volunteers who

would be willing to try the app after its release.

AGENCY REPORTS

NRCS

Kelli reported on the activities of NRCS stating that the office is working on EQIP, CSP and CRP contracts.

EXTENSION

Scott noted that there is an open house for Nathan Mueller later today. He is leaving UNL Extension to become the new NRCS Soil Health Specialist.

NRC

Steve reported that he will be on the scoring committee for Water Sustainability Fund Applications this year.

NARD

Steve stated that he has been appointed to the NARD I&E Committee. He reviewed award recipients for this year. Awards will be presented at the Fall Conference in Kearney. Steve also noted that the 1% additional retirement contribution passed and will take effect in January 2025. Staff will now contribute 6.5% and be matched at 7% by the NRD.

Steve Kelley, Duane Parde, Rod Skleba and Bob Lorenz who all attended the Republican River Basin Tour shared their experiences.

Announcements, Upcoming Meetings & Activities

July 4 <sup>th</sup>	Holiday – Independence Day
July 11 <sup>th</sup>	NRD Board Meeting
July 17 <sup>th</sup> - 19 <sup>th</sup>	GMDA Conference – Omaha, Nebraska

Being no further business, Chairperson Larry Barta adjourned the meeting at 10:48 a.m.

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*Secretary, Jason Sand*

I, the undersigned, Secretary of the Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District, hereby certify that these are true and correct minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the District held June 13, 2024, that all of the subjects discussed at the meeting were contained in the agenda for the meeting, kept continually current and readily available for public inspection at the principal office of the District during normal business hours, and except for items of an emergency nature, the agenda was not altered later than twenty-four (24) hours before the scheduled commencement of the meeting; that at least one copy of all reproducible material discussed at the meeting was available at the meeting for examination and copying by members of the public; that the minutes were in written form and available for public inspection within ten working days and prior to the next convened meeting for said body; and that all news media requesting notification of the meeting of said body were provided advance notification of the time and place of said meeting and the subjects to be discussed at said meeting.

:amk